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Results of this study indicate that the mass media does influence women's attitudes about nuclear war. A total of 45 female college students participated, with 26 students comprising the experimental group which viewed and read mass media materials, including "The Day After" and "Testament." The remainder of the students formed a control group. Subjects completed a pretest and posttest of 30 Likert-type questions about their attitudes toward nuclear related issues. Using the t-test with a statistical significance level of .05, it was determined that there was a significant difference between the pretest and posttest results of the experimental group, while there was no significant change for the control group. It is suggested that this change may be the result of having limited the study to women, who are oriented to care and response in their moral thinking, and to the steady presentation of nuclear war materials over a five week span. (Author/IS)

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Does the Mass Media Influence Women's Attitudes about Nuclear War

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Paper presented at the annual conference of the Western Social Science Association, Fort Worth, Texas, April 26, 1985

Running Head: Media on War

Abstract

The results of this study show that the mass media does influence women's attitudes about nuclear war. A total of 45 female college students participated with 26 subjects comprising the experimental group which viewed and read mass media materials, including The Day After and Testament. Subjects completed a pretest and posttest of 30 Likert-type questions about their attitudes toward nuclear related issues, and, using the t test with a statistical significance level of .05, it was determined that there was a significant difference between the pretest and posttest results of the experimental group while there was no significant change for the control group. It is suggested that this change may be the result of having limited the study to women, who, according to Carol Gilligan (1982), use an orientation of care and response in their moral thinking, and to the steady presentation of nuclear war materials over a five week span.

Does the Mass Media Influence Women's Attitudes about Nuclear War

Shortly after Robert Oppenheimer resigned his position as director of the Los Alamos Laboratories in October of 1945, he was given a certificate by General Leslie Groves that praised the laboratory for "valuable services rendered to the Nation on work essential to the production of the Atomic Bomb." Oppenheimer responded with a speech which included this comment:

> If atomic bombs are to be added as new weapons to the arsenals of a warring world, or to the arsenals of nations preparing for war, then the time will come when mankind will curse the names of Los Alamos and Hiroshima.
>
> The peoples of this world must unite, or they will perish. (Goodchild, 1981, pp.171-172)

The peoples of the world have not united. Wars are currently being fought in Central America, in Southeast Asia, in South Central Asia, in the Middle East, and in Africa. Forty years after Hiroshima there are five fully declared nuclear powers (USA, USSR, France, UK, China), but the technology for building simple atomic weapons is within the grasp of many other

countries. It has been estimated that the US has enough nuclear power to destroy every Russian 40 times and the Russians have enough nuclear power to destroy every American 20 times (Caldicott, 1984). As recently as March of 1985, the US Senate and the House of Representatives approved $1.5 billion for 21 additional MX missiles (dubbed the Peacekeepers) while US and Russian negotiators are engaged in arms-control talks. How are the peoples of the world dealing with this confusing, everpresent threat of nuclear destruction?

Robert Jay Lifton (1982) suggests that adults use "psychic numbing," a defense mechanism where the mind denies the offending images (nuclear destruction) or blocks the emotions normally felt with them. Studies conducted by de Rivera (1984) in 1982 suggest that adults are acknowledging a fear of nuclear war but they continue to use denial by thinking it won't happen during their lifetime. Research shows that children and adolescents are deeply affected by their fears of nuclear disaster and that they question whether there will be a world for their future (Schwebel, 1982, Beardslee, W. R. and Mack, J. G., 1983). Mack suggests that the unpredictability of life in a nuclear

age may be a reason for the "live for today" attitude among adolescents and for their apparent lack of commitment to long-term goals and relationships. Carl Rogers (1982) stated that the first step in working to stop our "terrible insanity--the trend toward nuclear war" (p. 7) is to change the policy of the United States government. Government policy is changed when public opinion changes in such a way that individuals choose to act on their new beliefs and elect politicians who will follow the will of the public.

The first half of the 1980's has shown an increasing number of films, books, cassette tapes, newspaper and magazine articles, lectures, and public discussions dealing with the possibility of nuclear war. Does this proliferation of information lead to a change in attitudes? It is the purpose of this study to determine whether the mass media does influence women's attitudes about nuclear war.

Method

Subjects

Subjects for the study were undergraduate female students from a small two-year state-supported branch campus located in the Southwest. Each subject

volunteered to complete the pretest and posttest questionnaires during their regular class time in five sections of undergraduate psychology courses. A total of 89 women completed the pretest; 41 of those women volunteered to spend approximately eight additional hours outside of class time viewing videos and reading articles relating to nuclear war. These women formed the experimental group. Subjects to form the control group were the 22 women who who did not volunteer for the additional time commitment and who had not seen the television or video productions of either The Day After or Testament. Of the 41 experimental group subjects, 26 (62%) did complete the required viewing and reading assignments. Of the 22 control group subjects, 19 (86%) completed the experiment.

Ages of both groups were comparable with 57.9% of the control group and 65.4% of the experimental group being between the ages of 18-30. Racial composition of the control group was 73.6% White, 5.2 % Hispanic, 15.7% Black, and 5.2% Asian. The experimental group consisted of 88.5% White, 7.6% Hispanic, 3.7% Black, and 0.0% Asian. The mean income for both the control group and the experimental group was between $15,000-

19,000. Of the control group, 31.6% were in the military, the spouse or dependent of a military person or a retired military person while 46.2% of the experimental group were in that position. No subject was a member of a nuclear freeze group.

Procedure

Subjects were asked to complete a 30-item Likert-type questionnaire pretest, where "1" represented a strong anti-nuclear stand, to determine their attitudes toward a nuclear weapons freeze, situations involving nuclear war, political issues involving the development of additional and new types of nuclear weapons, local issues involving nuclear waste disposal plants, nuclear warhead assembly plants, and attitudes toward the building and use of the Atomic bomb. These questions are presented in cluster form in Appendix A. Subjects in the control group were asked not to view or to read any of the material assigned to the experimental group. Experimental group subjects were to watch two television films, Testament and The Day After, a 30 minute documentary on the fortieth anniversary meeting at Los Alamos of the scientists who created the Atomic bomb, a brief excerpt from a Carl Sagan episode on

nuclear winter, and to read a variety of magazine and newspaper articles on different aspects of nuclear related topics. A listing of these materials is presented in Appendix B. The experimental group had approximately five weeks to complete on their own time these viewing and reading assignments. At the end of the fifth week period, a posttest consisting of the same questions was completed by subjects in the control and experimental groups.

Findings

The results of the study indicate that the mass media does influence women's attitudes about nuclear war. The control group showed no significant change (t=-.140, df=36, p<.05). The experimental group, however, showed a significant difference (t=3.532, df=50, p<.01). When the questions were divided into five clusters dealing with attitudes toward a nuclear freeze, the probability of and the effects of a nuclear war, political issues, local issues, and whether the Atomic bomb should have been made and used, the control group still showed no significant difference between the pretest and the posttest on any cluster, while the experimental group showed a significant difference in

four of the five clusters. See Table 1.

Insert Table 1 about here

Cluster 5, which did not indicate a significant change, consisted of two questions dealing with the research that led to the development of the Atomic bomb and with the dropping of the bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Movement was in an anti-nuclear direction.

Discussion

Adams (1984) concluded from his study that The Day After did not change the percentage of viewers who supported or opposed a bilateral nuclear freeze or unilateral disarmament. Time magazine hired ABT Associates of Cambridge, MA to conduct a poll where viewers of The Day After were questioned before and after the film and they concluded that the movie actually changed few opinions about nuclear war. Why, then, did this study of the influence of mass media on the attitudes of women about nuclear war show that their attitudes were changed?

Carol Gilligan's research (1982) indicates that there are two different voices or ways of speaking about moral issues. Women tend to use language in making moral decisions that deals with care and responsibility. They are concerned about connections, relationships, and not hurting. Men tend to use a justice orientation based on concepts of equality, reciprocity, and rights. The themes of both The Day After and Testament revolve around the care and responsibility issues. Testament basically brings the effects of a nuclear disaster down to one family. The father, who is presented as being a wonderful family man, is away on business when the bomb is dropped and he never returns home. The mother struggles against the devastating effects of radiation, only to bury two of her three children. She encourages her remaining son to check on elderly members of the community (responsibility), and he brings home a retarded boy who has lost his father (care). The Day After revolves around the relationships of the doctor to his family and his colleagues and shows him as a responsible man who tries to provide medical care for the masses of sick and injured people who are flocking to his

hospital (care and responsibility).

Adams study was limited to the viewing of The Day After where this study presents additional nuclear issue information from television news programs, documentaries, and newspaper and magazine articles to the subjects over a five week period. This steady presentation of information, limiting the study to women, and assigning materials that stress the care and responsibility issues may be the key factors in the change in attitudes.

It would be interesting to do a comparable study with men to determine if these same themes and the continuous presentation of information would bring about a change in their attitudes toward nuclear war, or if the themes would have to be changed to involve the language of justice, equality, reciprocity, and rights that Gilligan says characterizes the moral judgments of many men.

The Role of Professionals

Lifton (1982) and Milton Schwebel (1982) both make reference to the European Holocaust as they write about contemporary attitudes toward nuclear war. Lifton states:

> The majority of teachers in the universities in Nazi Germany did not actively take part in mass murder, but they sat back and did virtually nothing, or accommodated themselves or went along. There is a lesson in that for us. Now. Here. (Lifton, 1982, p. 17)

Schwebel (1982) states: "There is nothing that can be done about that Holocaust but study and remember it and assist the surviving victims....However, we can abort the one that's in the making" (p, 614).

Lifton (1982), in discussing nuclear issues, states that teachers have a special responsibility to move "from that destructive and self-destructive stance of resignation and cynicism toward a stance of addressing the problem of seeing oneself as responsible to the problem of joining with others and taking a stand" (p. 27). Lifton is not alone. He is joined by Schwebel (1982), Jerome Frank (1982), Carl Rogers (1982), and by many others who promote active involvement of teachers and social scientists in informing their students and the public of the danger of nuclear war.

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Appendix A

Cluster 1

Freeze: Bilateral, Verifiable, Unilateral;

Removal and Destruction of Nuclear Weapons

1. During arms negotiations with the Soviet Union, do you think the United States should or should not introduce a bilateral, verifiable nuclear weapons freeze policy to ban any further production, testing, and deployment of nuclear weapons?
   a. definitely should
   b. should
   c. no opinion
   d. should not
   e. definitely should not
2. Do you think the United States and the Soviet Union could or could not create a bilateral, nuclear weapons freeze policy that would be verifiable?
   a. definitely could
   b. could
   c. no opinion
   d. could not
   e. definitely could not

3. If the Soviet Union would not sign a bilateral, verifiable nuclear weapons freeze policy to ban any further production, testing, and deployment of nuclear weapons, would you or would you not be in favor of a unilateral nuclear weapons freeze policy for the United States?
   a. definitely would be
   b. would be
   c. no opinion
   d. would not be
   e. definitely would not be

22. Would you support or oppose government programs by the United states and Russia that called for a bilateral removal of and destruction of existing nuclear weapons?
   a. strongly support
   b. support
   c. no opinion
   d. oppose
   e. strongly oppose

Cluster 2

Nuclear War: Intentional, Accidental, Limited; Nuclear Winter; Survive or Die; Effects from Radiation

4. Do you think that it is probable or not very probable that there will be an intentional nuclear war within the next ten years.
   a. very probable
   b. probable
   c. no opinion
   d. not probable
   e. not very probable

5. Do you think that it is probable or not very probable that there will be an accidental nuclear war within the next ten years?
   a. very probable
   b. probable
   c. no opinion
   d. not probable
   e. not very probable

6. Do you believe that a limited nuclear war between the super powers could remain limited or do you believe it would turn into an all-out nuclear war?
   a. very probably could remain limited
   b. could remain limited
   c. no opinion
   d. would turn into an all-out nuclear war
   e. very probably would turn into an all-out nuclear war
7. How concerned or unconcerned are you with the possibility of a "nuclear winter"?
   a. very concerned
   b. concerned
   c. no opinion
   d. unconcerned
   e. very unconcerned

8. If a small strategic warhead with a yield of two megatons (the equivalent of two million tons of TNT or the explosive power of all of the bombs used during World War 11) were to be exploded within a forty mile radius of you, would you prefer to die instantly or to survive?

   a. die instantly

   b. survive

   c. no opinion

9. If a nuclear exchange involving 5,000 megatons, or about one-third of the currently existing nuclear weapons, should occur, would you prefer to die instantly or to survive?

   a. die instantly

   b. survive

   c. no opinion

11. Are you concerned or unconcerned with the long-term effects (cancer deaths and genetic damage) of exposure to radiation from a nuclear explosion?

    a. very concerned

    b. concerned

    c. no opinion

    d. unconcerned

    e. very unconcerned

Cluster 3

Political Issues: Mx, Starwars, Budget for Nuclear Development, Need for More Nuclear Weapons

10. Do you think the United States should continue or discontinue the plans for the development of the MX missile system?
    a. definitely should continue
    b. should continue
    c. no opinion
    d. should not continue
    e. definitely should not continue

12. Do you support or oppose a "Starwars" offensive system?
    a. strongly support
    b. support
    c. no opinion
    d. oppose
    e. strongly oppose

13. Do you support or oppose a "Starwars" defensive system?
    a. strongly support
    b. support
    c. no opinion
    d. oppose
    e. strongly oppose
14. Do you think military spending for nuclear development (MX system, space-based ballistic defense systems using lasers, etc.) should be greatly increased, increased somewhat, kept at the current level, reduced somewhat, or greatly reduced?
    a. greatly increased
    b. increased somewhat
    c. kept at the current level
    d. reduced somewhat
    e. greatly reduced
    f. no opinion

19. Do you support or oppose the concept that it is necessary to build more and better nuclear weapons in order to maintain the national security of the United States?

a. strongly support

b. support

c. no opinion

d. oppose

e. strongly oppose

Cluster 4

Local Issues: Nuclear Free Zone, Pantex, White Train, Waste Isolation Pilot Plant

15. Would you support or oppose local legislation to declare your town a "nuclear free zone" so that nuclear weapons, materials, or waste materials could not be transported through your town?

a. strongly support

b. support

c. no opinion

d. oppose

e. strongly oppose

16. Pantex, located just north of Amarillo, Txas, is the only nuclear warhead assembly plant in America. The annual payroll at Pantex is $57 million, its operating budget is $97 million, its construction budget is $20 million, its utility bill is $3 million, and its United Way contribution is $220,000. Do you support or oppose the Pantex plant?

    a. strongly support
    b. support
    c. no opinion
    d. oppose
    e. strongly oppose

17. The White Train has carried nuclear weapons from the Pantex plant in Amarillo across the United States for the past twenty years. A group called the Agape community watches for the unscheduled movement of the White Train and reports its location to other Agape groups so that they may peacefully protest the development of nuclear weapons that the White Train carries and represents. Do you support or oppose the peaceful protest of the White Train?

    a. strongly support
    b. support
    c. no opinion
    d. oppose
    e. strongly oppose

18. The U.S. Department of Energy is now building what is expected to be the first major geologic repository for radioactive waste in the United States twenty-five miles east of Carlsbad, New Mexico. Do you support or oppose the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant project (WIPP)?

    a. strongly support

    b. support

    c. no opinion

    d. oppose

    e. strongly oppose

Cluster 5

Atomic Bomb: Build, Drop

20. Knowing what you know now about nuclear weapons and nuclear energy, if it were possible to go back to the 1940's, would you support or oppose the research that led to the development of the Atomic bomb?

    a. strongly support
    b. support
    c. no opinion
    d. oppose
    e. strongly oppose

21. Knowing what you know now about nuclear weapons, if this were August of 1945, would you support or oppose the dropping of Atomic bombs by the United States on Hiroshima and Nagasaki?

    a. strongly support
    b. support
    c. no opinion
    d. oppose
    e. strongly oppose

Personal Information

24. What is your age group?

a. 18-30

b. 31-40

c. 41-50

d. 51-60

e. 61-70

f. over 70

25. What is your household income grouping before taxes? How many people does this include?_____

a. under $5,000

b. $5,000-9,999

c. $10,000-14,999

d. $15,000-19,999

e. $20,000-24,999

f. $25,000-29,999

g. $30,000-39,999

g. $40,000-50,000

h. over $50,000

26. What is your race?

    a. Asian

    b. Black

    c. Hispanic

    d. White

    e. Other

27. Have you seen

    a. Testament

        a. yes

        b. no

    b. The Day After

        a. yes

        b. no

28. Do you belong to any nuclear freeze groups?

    a. yes

    b. no

29. Write the last four numbers of your Social Security number here, please. ___ ___ ___ ___

30. Participation in the experimental group for this study will require a time commitment of approximately eight hours to be spent in viewing videos that deal with nuclear issues. Are you willing to make this time commitment?

    a. yes

    b. no

Appendix B

Reading and Viewing Materials

Bernstein, J. (Producer), & Littman, L. (Director). (1983). Testament [Film]. Los Angelas: Paramount.

Boffey, M. (1982, October 31). There's no limit for sky wars. The Dallas Morning News, pp. G-1,6.

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Table 1

Results of t-test

	Control (n = 19)		Experimental (n = 26)	
	t	df	t	df
Entire survey	-.140	36	3.532**	50
Cluster				
(1) Freeze	-1.101	36	3.532**	50
(2) Nuclear war	0.813	36	1.729*	50
(3) Political issues	0.122	36	4,429**	50
(4) Local issues	0.308	36	2.652**	50
(5) Atomic bomb	-0.683	36	1.599	50

Note. *p<.05. **p<.01.